

May 12, 2005

Mr. Pierce Homer
Secretary of Transportation
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

Commissioner's
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Office

Dear Secretary Homer:

On behalf of our tens of thousands of members and supporters in the Commonwealth, we are writing to inform you of our qualified support for the Fluor Daniel I-95 HOT lane proposal currently under consideration. After reviewing the Fluor proposal and the competing proposal submitted by the Clark Construction consortium, we believe that the Fluor plan is superior.

Although we have concerns with specific aspects of the Fluor proposal, we have found Fluor staff willing to consider appropriate changes in their approach. We have included our comments and questions below so that you may consider them in the course of your evaluation as well.

Our main comment focuses upon the use of HOT lanes to provide new public transportation services. As you know, value pricing of toll-managed lanes is an idea that is here to stay. HOT lanes offer many advantages over traditional highway construction and operating schemes, including the ability to leverage private capital, raise revenue, and reduce congestion.

At the same time, HOT lanes offer an uncongested corridor for express buses or bus rapid transit (BRT) service. Fluor's proposal is preferable because it more directly addresses the opportunity to enhance public transportation services in a HOT lane environment. Among other things, Fluor anticipates:

- The ability to use excess toll revenue to support transit (which currently is done on toll facilities in New York, San Diego, and other cities);
- Additional entrance and exit points for bus service; and
- Several park-and-ride facilities along the corridor.

Moreover, as the likely builder of HOT lanes on the Capital Beltway, Fluor is in a unique position to ensure that HOT lanes in both corridors are optimized for transit. As the region embarks on building a network of HOT lanes, a coordinated strategy is extremely important.

Although the Fluor plan is more forward-thinking on transit than the competing plan, many questions remain. For example, the conceptual renderings are vague, there are no plans for stations and other critical infrastructure (except for a few ramps and small park-and-ride lots), and there is no commitment to cover some of the costs of the new service.

These issues should be addressed before the project receives final approval. Specifically, we hope that you will push for a proposal that includes a feasibility study for BRT and a plan to cover some capital and operating expenses for new transit services (beginning in the first year of operations, not after the bondholders are repaid).

We have conducted preliminary modeling of an express bus/BRT system operating on HOT lanes in Northern Virginia. The modeling was based upon the MWCOG/TPB model, and the initial results were promising. We shared these results earlier this week with Fluor, the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC), and planners from various jurisdictions in Northern Virginia and WMATA in a meeting at the PRTC offices. Staff from VDOT were invited, but did not attend. We include a copy of the presentation handout materials for your information. We would be pleased to discuss this study with your staff at another time.

Our second comment is that the potential air quality impact of the Fluor proposal is not defined. As you know, recent studies have documented the connection between increased highway traffic and adverse health impacts in communities along those highways. For example, a California study found that exposure to fine particulates was 25 percent higher at a school 60 meters from a 190,000 ADT freeway than at locations one mile from the freeway. A Denver study found that children living within 750 feet of major roads had cancer risks six times greater than children living further away.

Adding more lanes to I-95 and the Capital Beltway will attract new vehicles and this will tend to increase air pollution and adverse health impacts for those living or working in close proximity to the highway. Thus, it is important to begin thinking about mitigation now. We would like to see Fluor produce a detailed analysis of the potential air quality impact, including the impact of mitigation measures like BRT. We believe it is important that VDOT and its PPTA partners make a strong commitment to evaluating, designing, and funding impact avoidance and mitigation as part of this and other projects that enhance mobility, incorporating such elements into PPTA agreements, project reviews and planning, and any final concession or project development agreements.

Thank you for considering our comments. We plan to submit more detailed comments during the NEPA process.

Sincerely,

SIGNATURE ON FILE AT VDOT

Michael Replogle
Environmental Defense

SIGNATURE ON FILE AT VDOT

William Vincent
Breakthrough Technologies Institute

Enclosure: Handout from 11 May 2005 charrette on BRT-HOT lanes

SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
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